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HOW TO MAKE OATS A PAYING CROP

By B. L. MOSS

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B. L. MOSS

SOSO, MISSISSIPPI

HOW TO MAKE OATS A PAYING CROP

By

B. L. Moss

Experience has amply proven to me that oats, even at present feed oats prices of about 50 cent a bushel, can be made one of our most profitable crops. Two bushels of oats are certainly equal to one bushel of corn in feeding value, and it is easier and less expensive to make 50 bushels oats per acre than it is to make 25 bushels corn per acre.

Add to this the further facts that (1) oats are a machine-grown and machine-harvested crop, thus avoiding the scarce and high-priced hand labor necessary in making row crops; (2) oats fit well into a live stock program, affording considerable good winter grazing and straw for helping to winter animals; and (3) oats may be followed the same year with another crop, such as lespedeza, cowpeas, soy beans, or even corn.

PLANT CERTIFIED SEED

Mixed seed oats, carrying Johnson grass, cheat, Darnell grass, dock, and other noxious weeds and grasses, are high-priced even if they were given free to the farmer-grower. They yield less per acre, and often carry bad weeds and grasses that infest the land and give trouble for years after. Most of the Johnson grass in cultivated fields has probably come from bad seed oats.

When you get Mississippi state-certified seed oats you get them at only 10 or 15 cents more per bushel than ordinary seed oats, and you are certain of making not only better yields per acre, but you can plant them with the assurance that you are not getting your fields infested with noxious weeds and grasses. If your acreage is large enough to justify it, say 50 to 75 acres or more, an oat drill for seeding your crop is one of the best investments you can make. I use a 7-foot drill, with fertilizer attachment. With this and a tractor, we seed 15 to 20 acres a day, and do the job much more uniformly and evenly than is possible by hand. Eight to 12 pecks seed per acre should be planted, with my personal preference being toward rather thick seeding. Last season I put down 11 pecks per acre, with excellent results.

SELECTING A VARIETY

In general, oats for the Central South may be divided into two main groups, - early maturing and late maturing. Best known among the early oats are Fulgrain, Fulghum, and Kanota, all of which mature some 10 days earlier than regular late season

oats; and, in general, these early varieties yield less per acre than the later oats. Their chief advantage is in that they mature early, thus extending the harvest season, in case the late varieties are also grown.

The best known of the regular or late season oats are Nortex, New Nortex, Hastings, Appler, Bayliss, Delta Station Strain, and Ferguson. Experiment station tests show little difference in the average per-acre yield of these varieties, and there is little to choose between them, if they are state-certified for purity, germination, and freedom from noxious weeds. If seed are not state-certified, I would not plant them under any conditions. Uncertified seed not only will yield less per acre, but they are almost certain to carry bad weed and grass seed that will give serious and permanent trouble.

SOIL PREPARATION FOR OATS

Here, on sandy loam lands, we first break with a tractor-drawn five-disc wheatland plow, then disc and section-harrow until the surface is as smooth as it is possible to make it. Remember, if a combine is to be used in harvesting, that good, efficient work cannot be done on rough land. Especially is this so if the oats are down at harvest time. On the other hand, on smooth land a good combine will get most of the oats, even if they are practically flat on the ground. By all means see to it that every stump, grub or other obstruction is removed in the fall; for one small stump hidden in oat field can so wreck a combine that the whole oat crop may be lost before the machine can be repaired.

FERTILIZING OATS

Almost any fairly well-drained land will make good oats, if well fertilized. On Delta soils, no superphosphate need be used, and this is probably true on hill lands in cotton the year before and well fertilized with superphosphate. With these exceptions, superphosphate will probably pay on oats under most conditions. It should be used at planting time, with a liberal application of nitrogen in late winter or early spring.

On practically all our soils, both hill and Delta, Experiment Station results show that as much as 32 pounds nitrogen per acre will pay well. This amount of nitrogen is supplied by 200 pounds nitrate of soda; and, according to most of our Station results, nitrate nitrogen is a little more efficient in oat production than other forms of nitrogen.

Here on hills lands, I personally used 48 pounds nitrogen in 1941, with excellent results. However, on any of the richer, better soils, even in the hill areas, probably 200 pounds nitrate of soda per acre is the maximum that should be used. Where a good crop of soy beans, cowpeas, crotalaria, or lespedeza has been grown the previous year, probably 16 pounds nitrogen per acre will be sufficient.

TIME TO APPLY FERTILIZERS

We apply our superphosphate when we plant in October, using a grain drill with fertilizer attachment, thus planting the oats and fertilizing at one operation. Then in the spring we use the same machine for top-dressing. I strongly urge the use of a machine if possible, as it gives a much more uniform distribution of the material than is possible by hand. In applying nitrogen, we make it a rule to begin about February 15, and finish not later than March 15. We set these fairly wide limits, because we use a tractor to pull our fertilizer drill, and there will always, in this four weeks' period, be spells of bad weather when the ground will be too soft for the tractor to operate. Most top-dresser applications are made too late for best results, and the job should be finshed not later than March 10-15.

USING THE GRAIN COMBINE

The introduction of the small combine or harvester has simplified the oat-harvesting problem, and eliminated much of the expensive hand labor that once went with the operation.

To use the combine to best advantage, the land should not be too steep, terraces should be very wide -- 24 feet if possible -- all stumps, grubs, and other obstructions must be removed, and the surface should be made just as smooth as it is possible to get it.

In order that the crop may be harvested ahead of possible weather damage, the acreage allowed for each combine must not be too large.

With a 40-inch combine, probably not over 40 to 60 acres should be allowed; for a 60-inch machine, 60 to 100 acres; and for a 72-inch machine, a proportionately larger area. Of course, the acreage handled will depend somewhat on the yield per acre, as a machine cannot cover ground as fast in 60-bushel-per-acre oats as it can in oats making 30 bushels. Size of fields, slopes, terraces, and smoothness of ground are also factors to be considered.

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